

To,
The Executive Director
Instructional Quality Commission
Curriculum Frameworks and Instructional Resources Division (CFIRD)
California Department of Education
1430 N Street, Room 3207
Sacramento, CA 95814

Subject: Negative portrayal of Hinduism in current textbooks.

Dear Madam / Sir

Warm Greetings,

We write to you as a group of concerned citizens of the United States of America and as residents of California and wish to bring to your notice that blatant anomalies exist in the chapter on Hinduism in the 6th grade Social Science textbooks. We are disappointed that enough steps have not been taken to rectify these in the current review of History and Social Science framework.

Many of us having been students and having studied those textbooks ourselves when in our 6th grade, we find the chapter on Hinduism laden with a lot of factual inaccuracies, errors of emphasis, stereotypes, and in places, lacking in basic dignity and sensitivity. The concepts representative of Hinduism and the Indian civilization have been given a complete miss, while aberrations are presented as if they were the core concepts. While other religions like Christianity, Islam and Judaism are not only presented based on what their followers believe are their teachings, even with quotations from their sacred texts and pictorial representations of sacred symbols, sacred music etc, Hinduism is presented from an outsider's perspective peppered with highly contested theories and not the recent best scholarship on the subject or what the Hindus think of themselves or their religion. This raises suspicion of both conscious as well as institutional bias against Hinduism.

California's 'Standards for Evaluating Instructional Materials for Social Content clearly mandates that "No religious belief or practice may be held up to ridicule and no religious group may be portrayed as inferior."

We hereby would like to bring to your notice some of the issues in the current History and Social Science framework and urge you to rectify them.

- 1) In the paragraph on Early Civilizations, the much discredited 'Aryan Invasion Theory' first propagated by Colonial powers in India to "divide and rule" the natives of India, is being presented as an established fact whereas archeological evidence as well as recent studies in Genetics overwhelmingly point to the fact that such an Invasion is improbable.
- 2) In archeological excavations of Harappan sites since more than half a century now, aspects of culture that correspond directly to the current day Hindu customs and practices such as terracotta figurines of Yogic postures, Dolls in 'Namaste' pose, Women with vermilion on their foreheads etc have been found and well documented. This is given a complete miss. Cultural continuity is one of the most remarkable features of Indian civilization and suppressing this deprives Hindu culture and civilization of its depth.

- 3) It is surprising that aspects of contemporary relevance like Yoga, Ayurveda, Ahimsa (non-injury) that find their roots in Vedic culture do not find even a mention. Hindu sacred dance traditions such as Bharatanatyam and Indian classical music are conspicuously absent, while the 'Standards for Evaluating Instructional Materials for Social Content' published by California Department of Education does state that religious music and art, may be included in instructional materials.
- 4) Mahatma Gandhi's methods of 'nonviolent disobedience' were greatly inspired by Hindu spiritual texts like Bhagavad Gita and Ramayana as he himself has noted in his writings and as also noted in his biography. But this fact has been completely ignored while attempts are made to locate his influences elsewhere, even in Buddhism.
- 5) The Vedantic worldview which forms the basis of Hinduism's pluralism as well as concepts such as Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha are not presented at all giving an impression that Hinduism lacks any significant teachings.
- 6) The fact that Hindu ideas greatly influenced prominent Americans like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, J D Salinger, the Beatles etc, are also ignored completely.
- 7) The whole chapter on Hinduism has disproportionate space on 'caste system', and hence allows no space for anything meaningful about Hinduism.

When contrasted with the chapters on other religions, it gives an impression that Hinduism is a primitive religion with ruthless practices lacking any significant teachings, aesthetics, music or anything of contemporary relevance that is fit to be ignored at best and condemned at worst.

We urge you to make necessary updates to the framework and thereby the textbooks so that Hinduism is taught without being subjected to unnecessary and unfair distortions and with sensitivity, fairness and dignity as promised by the Californian law and the standards of California Department of Education.

Sincerely,



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